

P R E S E N T E D B Y N S C | O R C H S E



## **2021 HOP Summit Day 2 Plenary**

# **Working Scared** **How Safety Leaders Can Create Psychological Safety**

**Dr. Martha Acosta**



# Working Scared

## How Safety Leaders Can Create Psychological Safety

**How often do you experience conflict in your organization? Include debate, disagreements, contradiction, dissent, confusion, expressions of frustration, anger and disappointment.**

**PETE NANOS**



**Vice Admiral (Ret)  
United States Navy  
Former Director  
Los Alamos National  
Laboratory**

**“As of today, all operations at the laboratory are suspended.”**

**"This willful flouting of the rules must stop, and I don't care how many people I have to fire to make it stop. If you think the rules are silly, if you think compliance is a joke, please resign now and save me the trouble."**

Internal Email: May 2004

**TODD CONKLIN**



**Author**  
**Former Sr. Advisor to the**  
**Associate Director,**  
**Los Alamos National**  
**Laboratory**

## **Human and Organizational Performance Principles**

- 1: Mistakes are Normal
- 2: Blame Fixes Nothing
- 3: Context Drives Behavior
- 4: Learning is Key
- 5: How Management Responds to Failure Matters

Five Principles of Human Performance, 2019

**“THE GREATEST DANGER IN  
TURBULENT TIMES IS NOT THE  
TURBULENCE, BUT TO ACT WITH  
YESTERDAY’S LOGIC.”**

**~ Peter Drucker**



## Volatile

Rapid changes, ups & downs/big swings

## Uncertain

Difficult to predict future events/values

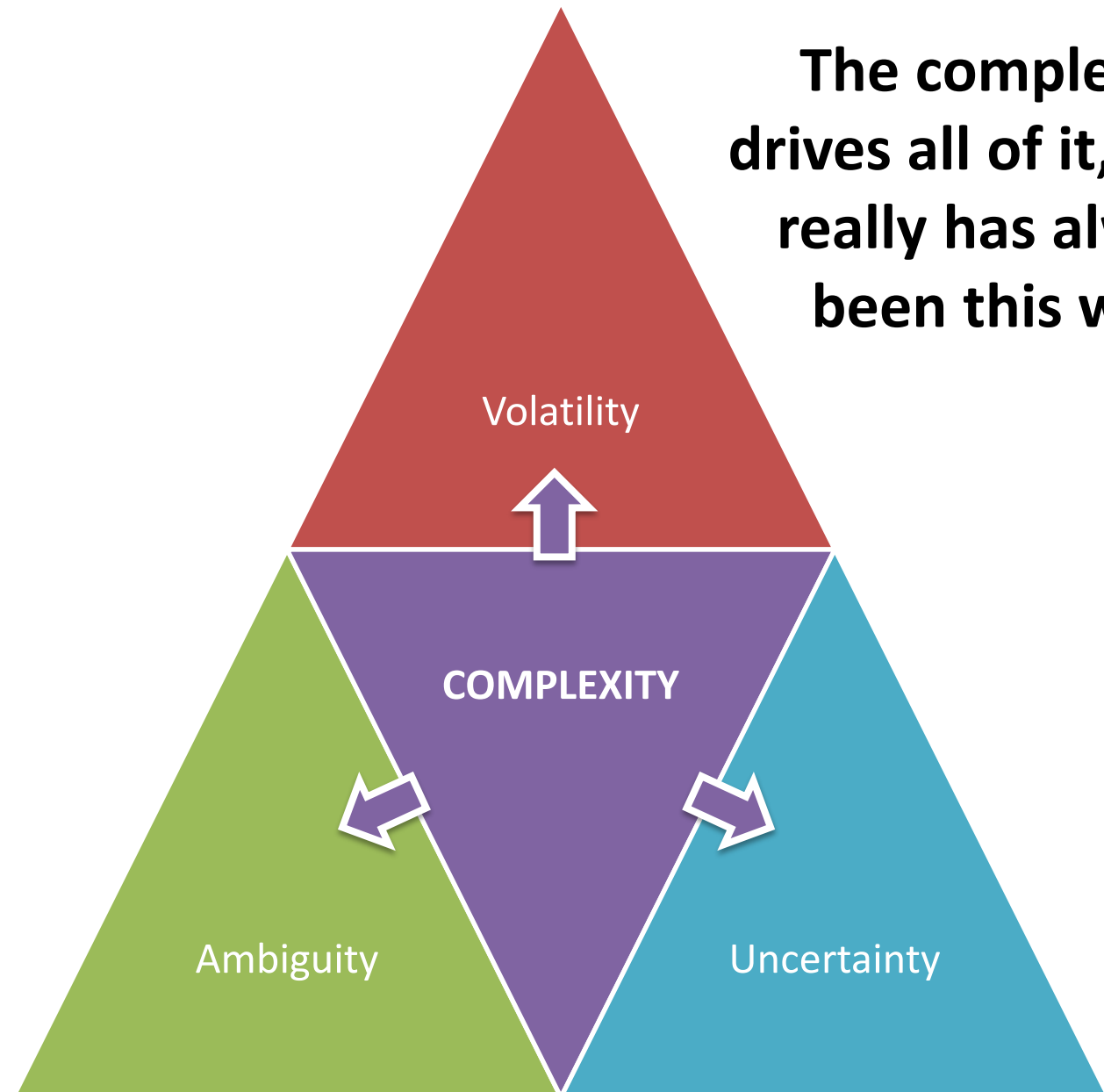
# VUCA

## Complex

Multiple independent and interconnected systems

## Ambiguous

Unclear, even contradictory, meaning of signals/events



**The complexity  
drives all of it, and it  
really has always  
been this way.**

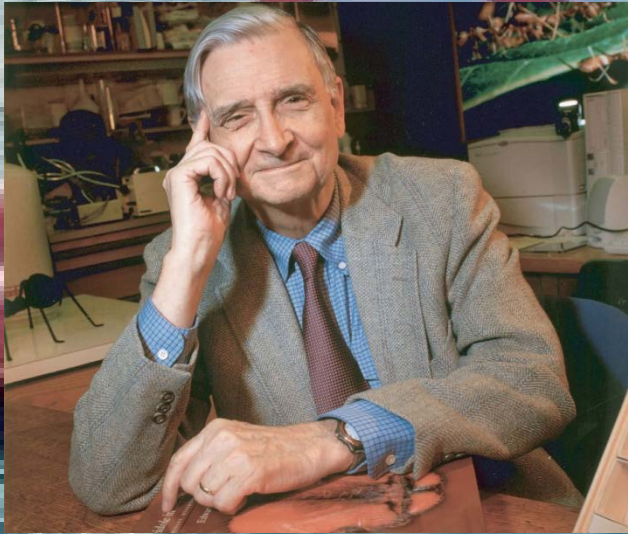


**ALL HUMAN SYSTEMS ARE  
COMPLEX ADAPTIVE SYSTEMS**

# PRINCIPLES OF HUMAN AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMPLEXITY

- 1: Mistakes are Normal Failure is Inevitable
- 2: Blame Fixes Nothing Blame Endangers Everything
- 3: Context Drives Behavior Meaning (Emotions + Narrative) Drives Behavior
- 4: Learning is Key Adapting is Key
- 5: How Management Responds to Failure Matters  
How Leaders Respond Emotionally is Meaningful

E.O. Wilson



Professor Emeritus at  
Harvard University and "the  
father of sociobiology"

# What do termites, mole rats and humans have in common?



**NOT BELONGING IS A EXISTENTIAL THREAT**

**Ad-hoc Teams**

**Cross-functional  
Projects**

**Matrixed  
Organizations**

**Outside Experts and  
Consultants**



# **COMMON KNOWLEDGE EFFECT**

**The tendency for information held by most members of a group to be more likely shared and to exert influence than information not held by most members.**

**AMY EDMONDSON**



**Novartis Professor of  
Leadership and  
Management,  
Harvard Business School**

**“It’s simple human nature. We don’t want to ruffle feathers. We don’t want to be the Cassandra. We don’t want to be thought of as stupid when we say: “I just don’t see how this is going to work.” We don’t want a dressing down when we point out a quality problem. On top of that, the incentives embedded in most workplaces conspire against 1) employees speaking up and 2) managers actually hearing them.”**

**Have you experienced this?**

Harvard Business Review: Boeing and the Importance of Encouraging Employees to Speak Up, May 2019



NOT SAFE



SAFE



**PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY IS A SHARED BELIEF  
AMONG A GROUP OF PEOPLE THAT IT IS  
SAFE TO TAKE EMOTIONAL RISKS**



**PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY IS THE  
PRECENCE OF EMOTIONAL CAPACITY**

JULIA ROZOVSKY  
GOOGLE PEOPLE OPERATIONS



## Google's Project Aristotle

***“Psychological safety was far and away the most important of the five dynamics we found – it’s the underpinning of the other four.”***

Google spent 2 years studying 180 teams and analyzing 250 different team attributes

## Openness explains mortality rates among 137 English National Health Service Acute Trusts

A one-point increase in the standardized openness score was associated with a 6.48 percent reduction in hospital mortality rates.

Toffolutti and Stuckler, *Health Affairs*, 2019

**PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY ISN'T  
SOMETHING AN ORGANIZATION  
EITHER HAS OR DOESN'T HAVE, IT'S  
SOMETHING LEADERS MUST  
ACTIVELY CREATE.**



**ICEBERGS AREN'T  
ADAPTIVE**

**You have been suffering from terrible symptoms that have impacted your performance at work and life at home is suffering as well. You go see a specialist who says she knows what is wrong with you and gives you two options. Which do you choose? (*Neither will work if you take both*).**

- a) A treatment that gets rid of your symptoms immediately but doesn't address the underlying problem. The symptoms will keep arising so, over time, you will need to take the treatment more frequently, and the problem may get worse.
- b) A treatment that addresses the cause and “cures” the problem. But it may take some time and you will feel your symptoms more acutely while you are in treatment.

**GEORGE VAILLANT**



**Professor at Harvard Medical  
School and Director of  
Research for the Department  
of Psychiatry, Brigham and  
Women's Hospital**

## **A. Maladaptive Defenses**

Defending against emotions to avoid the pain of a difficult situation

## **B. Adaptive Defenses**

Creating a safe environment to express your uncomfortable emotions so that you can learn from them and deal with the difficult situation in which they arose

Adaptation to Life, 1995



GEORGE VAILLANT



Professor at Harvard Medical  
School and Director of  
Research for the Department  
of Psychiatry, Brigham and  
Women's Hospital

## A. Maladaptive Defenses

Defending against emotions to avoid the pain of a difficult situation

UNCONSCIOUS

## B. Adaptive Defenses

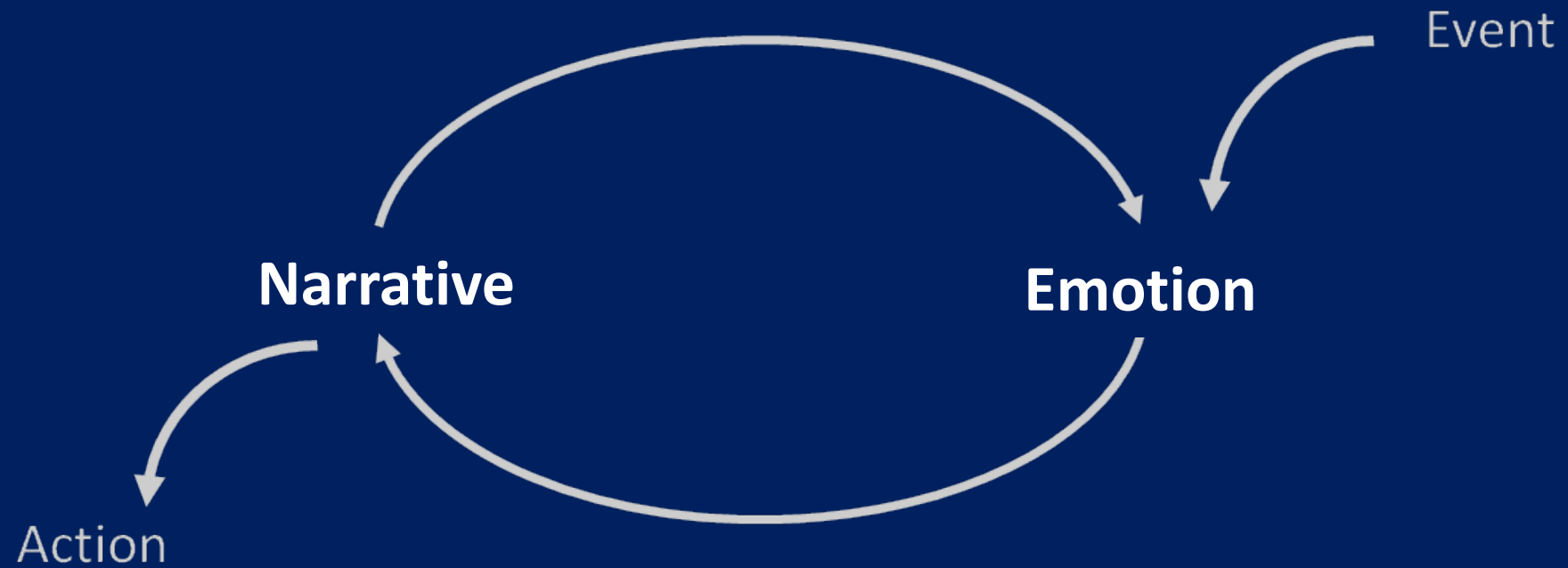
Creating a safe environment to express your uncomfortable emotions so that you can learn from them and deal with the difficult situation in which they arose

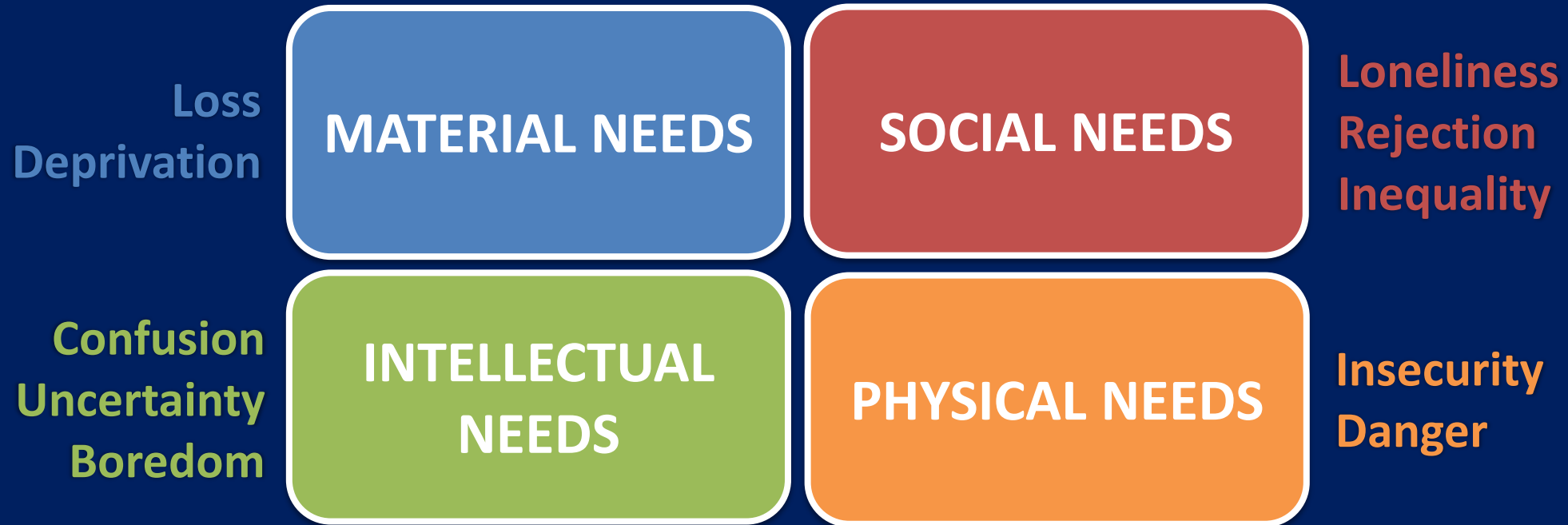
CONSCIOUS

Adaptation to Life, 1995



# ADAPTATION



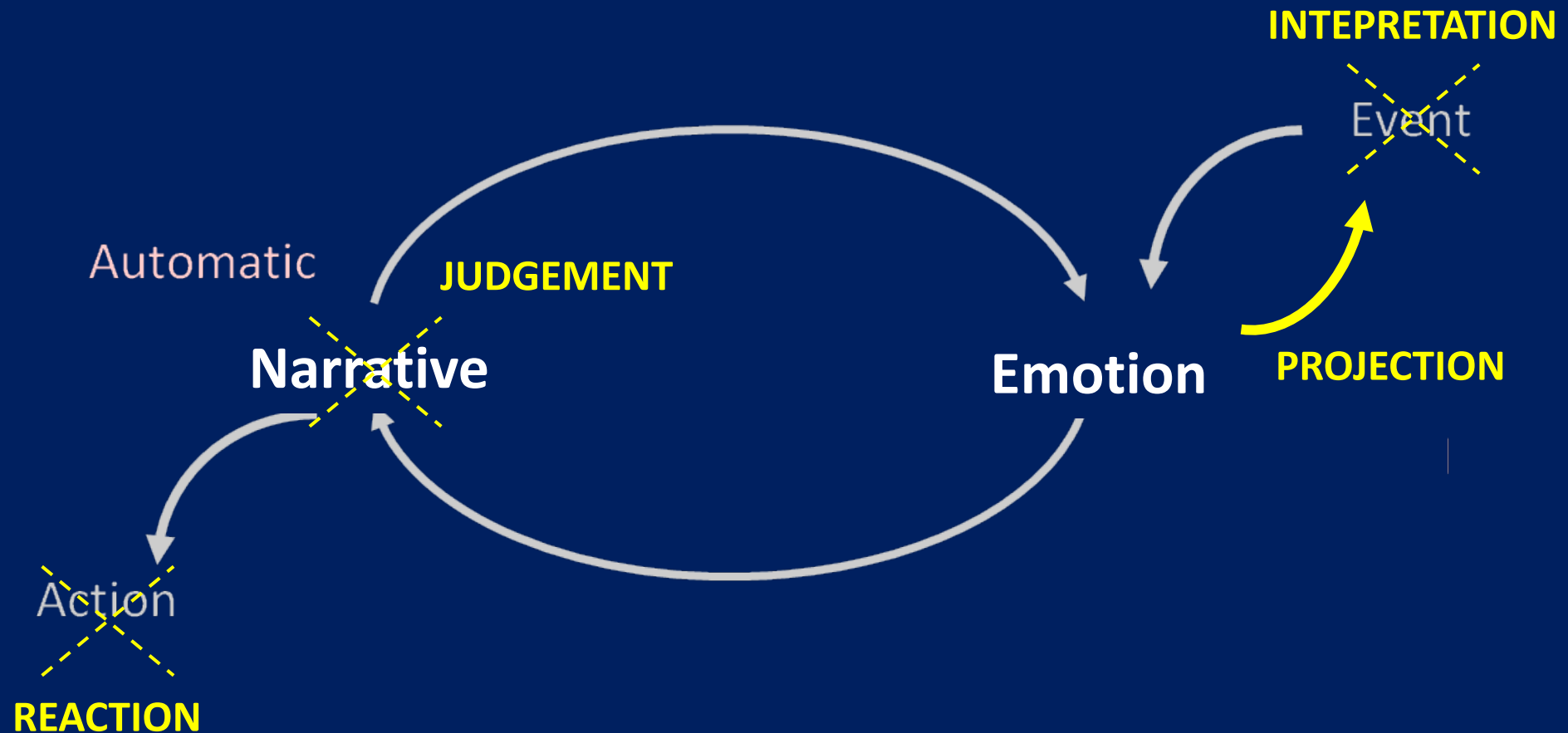


**SURVIVAL = NEEDS BEING MET**

**PLEASURABLE EMOTIONS = NEEDS ARE MET**

**PAINFUL EMOTIONS = NEEDS ARE NOT MET**

# DEFENSIVENESS



Our worst fears realized!

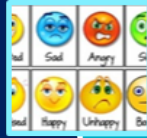
## TRIGGER

### HOOK



- What beliefs or judgements do you have about it that hooks you?

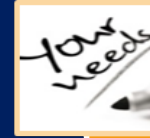
### EMOTIONS



- What feelings does that belief or judgement about the situation evoke?

PAUSE

### NEEDS



- What unmet need do you have that if met would improve the situation?

**WHAT IF IT'S YOU?**



**PETE NANOS**



Vice Admiral (Ret)  
United States Navy  
Former Director  
Los Alamos National  
Laboratory

## WHAT IF?

**“As of today, all operations at the laboratory are suspended.”**

**I’m ANGRY someone had to get hurt for us to realize that compliance isn’t working, the rules aren’t keeping people safe. I’m AFRAID someone else will get hurt, or even die. We must stop. Pause. Figure out what this organization NEEDS for it to operate safely. I NEED to understand what’s happening. I NEED for all of us come together, courageously add your voice and share your ideas.**

He didn’t say this

**EMOTIONS + NARRATIVE = MEANING**



# MEANING

**TAKING ACCOUNTIBILITY =  
TAKING BLAME**

True or False?

# MEANING

**EXPERTISE = BEING RIGHT**

True or False?

# MEANING

**PROBLEM SOLVING =  
SOLUTION FINDING**

True or False?

# MEANING

**PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT =  
REWARD OR PUNISHMENT**

True or False?

LINDA HILL



**Wallace Brett Donham**  
**Professor of Business**  
**Administration,**  
**Harvard Business School**

## 4 Ways Managers Define What's Safe

- 1: Role Definition: What identities can I safely have?
- 2: Processes and Procedures: What are the things I can and cannot not do?
- 3: Communication and Interaction Norms: What can I say, who can I say it to, and how can I say it?
- 4: Measurement: What will I be praised for, what will I be punished for?

Being the Boss, 2011

## *My Psychological Safety Action Plan*

<i>Roles</i>	<i>Processes</i>	<i>Communication</i>	<i>Measurement</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>In pre-job briefs clarify roles and discuss role conflicts</i></li><li>• <i>Designate assumption challenger(s)</i></li><li>• <i>Assign for diversity</i></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Add failure testing to procedures</i></li><li>• <i>Include a pause at critical steps</i></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Model openness</i></li><li>• <i>Talk about what I don't know</i></li><li>• <i>Listen first, paraphrase, speak last</i></li><li>• <i>Seek candor</i></li><li>• <i>negotiate needs, not solutions</i></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Look for indicators of learning</i></li><li>• <i>Focus on monitoring over measuring outcomes</i></li></ul>

# PRINCIPLES OF HUMAN AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMPLEXITY

- 1: Failure is Inevitable
- 2: Blame Endangers Everything
- 3: Meaning Drives Behavior
- 4: Adapting is Key
- 5: How Leaders Respond Emotionally is Meaningful